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ABSTRACT

The Association of Teacher Educators (ATE) has established a Commission on Alternative Certification and charged it with writing standards for nontraditional teacher certification programs. The ATE does not advocate the use of emergency-certified and out-of-license college graduates in the place of integrated four- or five-year teacher education programs. The following conditions are the basis for the recommendations in this document: (1) teacher licensing programs should be legally sanctioned by the state; (2) school districts are empowered to select, hire, and recommend alternative candidates for certification; (3) alternative programs are intended to recruit or select college graduates other than those prepared in regular teacher education programs; (4) the required professional preparation is essentially hands-on, on-the-job training with supporting workshops or courses; and (5) programs are school-based and may or may not include the cooperation or the participation of universities. Twenty-three specific recommendations are made. (JD)

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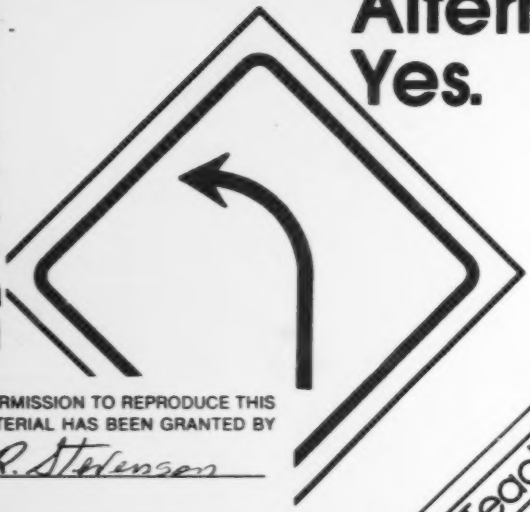

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Minimum Standards for Alternative Teacher Certification Programs

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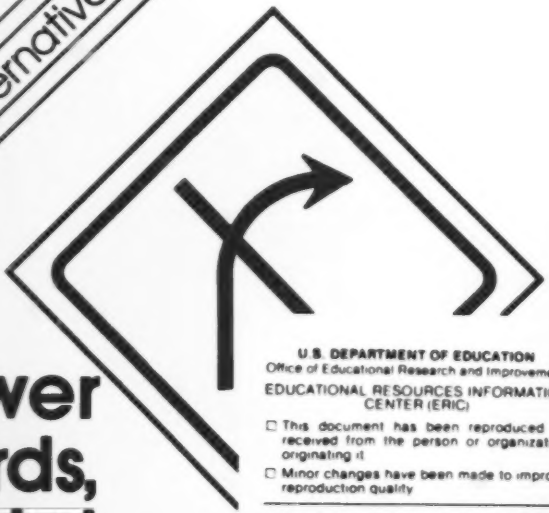

Lower Standards, No!

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Alternatives, Yes.
Lower Standards, No!

Minimum Standards for Alternative Teacher Certification Programs

Association of Teacher Educators

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Foreword

Innovations in ways to prepare people for teaching are always welcome, provided that high standards are observed. We need both more variety and greater creativity in the education of teachers. Teaching in schools today is more difficult than ever before. The best people with the best preparation are essential to staff schools in our increasingly complex and baffling world. So I am pleased to see a greater number of experiments and demonstrations under way.

Alternative approaches to preparing and certifying teachers always arise when there is a teacher shortage. The motivation to find more teachers prompts initiative and innovation.

To assist the initiators and the innovators, the Association of Teacher Educators (ATE) established a Commission on Alternative Certification and charged it with writing standards for nontraditional programs. A group of creative thinkers who are also realists agreed to serve on the commission. I am pleased with the thoroughness, the good sense, and the openmindedness that they have shown in drafting the contents of this volume.

As well as assisting initiators and innovators, the standards should be useful in calling to task educators who mount programs that ignore the accumulated knowledge about learning to teach. We can celebrate the new thinking that the teacher shortage prompts, but we must guard against shortcuts that ill prepare people to help youngsters learn. This pamphlet reminds us all of the essentials in educating teachers.

John Sikula
ATE President, 1989–90

Preface

The Association of Teacher Educators (ATE) is committed to excellence in teacher education. To achieve high standards among all beginning professionals, ATE advocates the incorporation of three knowledge bases into programs of preparation: the experiential knowledge of master classroom teachers; the research literature related to instruction; and the theoretical-conceptual knowledge of the education professoriat in instruction, curriculum, human development, learning, and foundations.

ATE condemns the use of emergency-certified and out-of-license college graduates (that is, personnel without professional training) as a dangerous practice that should be discontinued. The Association recognizes the continuing need for beginning teachers in most urban school districts and in some remote rural areas. Further, it is aware of laws in several states that provide for alternative certification programs. Unfortunately, in some states this amounts to little more than assigning unprepared college graduates to classrooms and letting the students screen for survivors. In other states there are programmatic elements, including entrance and exit tests, that offer some instruction to beginning teachers; there are provisions for master teachers to serve as mentors; and there is supporting course work from universities. Although ATE acknowledges the existence of these programs and the probability of their growing, it does not advocate such efforts in place of integrated four-year, five-year, or fifth-year teacher education programs. Alternative certification programs should be offered only in school districts where extreme teacher shortages exist.

To respond to the very diverse set of practices existing in the states that allow alternative certification programs and to ensure that minimum standards are followed in all such programs, ATE recommends that the guidelines in this publication be adopted as minimum standards.

Commission on Alternative Certification

Introduction

No one today would think of putting a person into a job as an engineer, an architect, or an accountant without special training. Yet the practice of hiring people to teach who have no specific preparation for teaching continues to be prevalent. It happens most often when there is a teacher shortage. The excuse then is that classrooms cannot be left unstaffed. Children cannot be deprived of a teacher. The question is whether having an unqualified teacher is better than having no teacher at all. Such a question would never arise when the job is designing a bridge or auditing an account.

There are those who advocate hiring liberal arts graduates as teachers. They believe that teachers need only know the subject matter they teach, that a well-educated individual can easily learn the techniques of teaching on the job, by trial and error. Most of these people want new blood in American classrooms. They see teachers as undereducated, bland, and in a rut. They want a guarantee that teachers are liberally educated.

The reputation of the normal school persists. There remains the suspicion that teachers know only the methods of teaching and that teacher education teaches little else. That, of course, is no longer true. Teachers today who graduate from nationally accredited teacher education programs receive a general education comparable to that of any other college student. Typically, in the first two years they complete the same course work as other first- and second-year students.

Teachers, of course, vary in ability, just as they do in interests, life experiences, talent, and personality. There is also

variety in the quality of colleges that prospective teachers attend, even among accredited schools. By and large, today's new teachers are well educated. They know the subject they are to teach, the nature of the children they will teach, and the techniques of teaching. They are ready to *begin* teaching. However,

> they are not thoroughly proficient. They are also not ready to fine-tune their competence without assistance and support. A complete conception and a realistic awareness of being a teacher cannot be gained entirely, simulated exactly, or understood sufficiently in preservice training. Even a superb student teaching experience lacks the completeness and the realism of a first teaching job. (Huling-Austin, Odell, Ishler, Kay, & Edelfelt, 1989, p. 2)

There is no one best way to prepare teachers. There are, however, some general standards that apply to any teacher education program. Some alternative programs for certification are experiments designed to find new and more effective ways to prepare teachers. Such programs can be encouraged, but they should observe standards that grow out of years of experience in teacher education.

The increasing shortage of teachers will undoubtedly motivate people to seek new ways to persuade college graduates to become teachers. It can also be a time when more experimentation is encouraged. If the need for teachers is used to find different and better ways to prepare teachers, a crisis may cause a triumph. The standards in this document are intended to foster that process and outcome.

Alternative certification programs are defined by the following conditions:

1. The state has passed legislation or a state education agency has promulgated policies and procedures to establish a legally sanctioned process for licensing teachers who have not had prior professional training.

2. School districts are empowered to select, to hire, and ultimately to recommend alternative candidates for certification.
3. Alternative programs are intended to recruit or select college graduates other than those prepared in regular teacher education programs.
4. The required professional preparation is essentially hands-on, on-the-job training with some supporting workshops or courses.
5. Programs are school based and may or may not include the cooperation or the participation of universities. Individual faculty may contribute services to particular programs.

Recommendations

Beginning teachers need a broad program of general-liberal studies common to all college graduates that prepares them for lifelong learning and for citizenship in a democratic society.

Candidates should be educated as participating citizens before they are prepared as future teachers. Their education, like that of all college graduates, must encompass the broad range of knowledge, skills, and values that undergird the life of participating citizens.

A person's holding a bachelor's degree from any college or university in any major does not necessarily mean that he or she has completed a broad range of general studies. Some baccalaureate programs permit students to graduate with a very narrow range of common core studies, that is, with a minimum of general education. For example, music and arts students may have no required instruction in physical science or college mathematics, or students in a professional school (e.g., engineering or nursing) may take few if any courses in the humanities.

Every graduate accepted into an alternative teacher certification program should have completed a range of college courses that serve as a common core for being a thoughtful, democratic citizen. Such courses should lead to a command of major concepts in the following fields: written and oral communication, mathematics, social science, physical science, humanities (including the arts and literature), and non-Western contemporary culture.

The state examinations in basic skills required of students in regular teacher education programs should be required of candidates in alternative certification programs.

These tests should be successfully completed before a person begins a program of alternative certification.

The state tests of subject-matter proficiency required of regular teacher certification candidates should be required of alternative certification candidates.

In states in which a program of subject-matter study may substitute for an examination, the same rules should apply to alternative certification graduates.

Many college graduates major in areas or fields of study such as architecture, journalism, accounting, theater arts, and pharmacy. If such majors are overly narrow in their specialization, they may not be appropriate preparation for teachers in elementary or even secondary schools.

Candidates for alternative certification programs should be screened on the basis of more than test scores and transcripts: Personal interviews, structured to assess a candidate's orientations to the nature of teaching, the nature of students, and the goals of the school, must be part of the selection process.

This standard requires using validated interviewing and selection procedures that are neither cumbersome nor prohibitively expensive.

College graduation does not automatically ensure that an individual has a positive attitude toward at-risk students, an understanding that teaching involves much more than basic

skills, or a commitment that schools have broader goals than job training.

The process of selecting candidates should include an interview that involves highly qualified teachers.

Highly qualified classroom teachers who serve as mentors and coaches should be members of interview teams, as should supervisors and school principals. At least two such professional educators should conduct each interview. Interviewers should be trained and skilled in the use of a validated interview guide.

The process of selecting candidates must include an analysis of their career and work histories, the type and the nature of their previous careers, their performance in former jobs, periods of employment (and unemployment), unexplained periods in work histories, incarceration, hospitalization, and other conditions and characteristics.

The work history of candidates for alternative certification programs should be examined. Candidates who have not demonstrated qualities characterizing effective teachers should be rejected.

Selection into an alternative certification program should follow direct experiences with children and youth.

Direct experiences should include supervision to enable the candidate to receive feedback on his or her interaction with children and youth. This requirement will not impede a school's ability to attract serious candidates

because it can be met with a summer of paid work before employment. Such experience should be considered part of the selection process. Structured interviews (as recommended in *4*, *5*, and *6*) are enhanced when screeners and candidates have real and recent experiences to evaluate. Such direct experiences, although minimal, enable some candidates to opt out or be selected out, and thereby save great expense to the system and possible negative effects on children and youth. Sensitive applicants, no matter how negative or uninformed their view of professional courses may be, will welcome this requirement for contact and interaction with children and youth before committing themselves to teaching.

Wherever possible, prior direct experiences with children and youth (as in recommendation *7*) should be in the same school buildings where candidates will begin as intern teachers.

The advantages of this procedure are obvious. Orientation to the school community, parents, the curriculum, and building and district policies will be facilitated. Opportunities to become familiar with equipment and to make and gather materials will be increased.

Alternative certification candidates should be paid for the direct, supervised experiences indicated in recommendations *7* and *8*. State and/or district funds should be provided for alternative certification candidates to be paid at the same rate as that of beginning alternative certification teachers.

A paid experience will serve as a recruiting mechanism and not penalize those who change careers, those with family responsi-

bilities, and those with fewer resources. It will be vital in attracting minorities. Without such stipends a direct experience requirement (recommended in 7 and 8) will not attract the new constituencies (people of different ages, diverse ethnic and racial origins, and varied life experience) needed in schools.

Districts using alternative certification programs should seek to hire at least 10 percent more candidates than their projected need.

Given recommendation 7, it is desirable and should be required that a few alternative certification candidates (up to 10 percent) begin their preliminary fieldwork in September or as close to the start of the school year as possible, to be ready to fill the vacancies that can be anticipated during the year.

Some beginning teachers will not succeed; others will leave for a variety of other reasons. Vacancies can be predicted to occur in the first semester. Programs of education for children and youth should not be interrupted or upset by alternative certification programs.

Experienced teachers should serve as mentors, support teachers, and coaches of alternative certification candidates throughout their first year, at a ratio of two candidates to one experienced teacher. During the second and third years the ratio might become eight to one. At least 20 percent of the experienced teachers' assigned load should be allocated to the mentor role.

Alternative certification candidates need the most help during their first year. In subsequent years they need less, so mentors can work with an increased number in varied locations.

During the first year the experienced teachers serving as mentors should teach in the same school building as the interns with whom they work.

Proximity fosters, or at least makes easier, the consultation and the interaction essential to the nurturing of intern teachers. Having mentors on site facilitates such contact during this period.

Experienced teachers serving as mentors should be selected by a panel of highly qualified teachers and administrators on openly stated criteria and should be paid extra on the basis of the number of candidates they supervise.

Stipends will vary by state and district. Five hundred dollars is recommended as a minimum for each first-year alternative certification candidate with whom a mentor works.

Mentor teachers should receive special training in coaching, supporting, and advising alternative certification candidates.

Training might be offered by university personnel, consultants, highly qualified classroom teachers, supervisors, or administrators. Individuals outside education (e.g., resource people with multicultural perspectives, computer skills, or other specific areas of expertise) might also be involved in such training (see Huling-Austin et al., 1989).

Alternative certification candidates should not be required to take more than one three-credit course or more than 45 hours of instruction per semester—from any source—during their first year of teaching.

The exhausting nature of learning to teach on the job, in addition to all the planning and preparation for teaching youngsters, must be recognized. Afternoon, evening, and weekend study should be limited, so that essential time is not taken from teaching and so that the study itself can be worthwhile.

During the first semester of their first year, alternative certification candidates should be assigned less than a full teaching load.

Learning a school's many rules and regulations, assuming the role of teacher, and making time for planning are so demanding in the first semester that more time should be provided for the beginner, particularly when there has been no prior preparation for teaching. In addition the time needed to review and analyze teaching with a mentor requires a lighter load.

Alternative certification programs as represented in recommendations *6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15,* and *16* are more costly than regular programs. They should be offered for the purpose of recruiting new, talented personnel into teaching, not as a means of saving money.

Alternative certification programs should not become a low-cost quick fix for at-risk students in urban areas.

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The professional studies required in alternative certification programs should be offered in cooperation with schools of education.

School districts operating without university cooperation should be required to file explanations of why such cooperation does not exist.

Alternative certification programs should be evaluated, and evaluations should be part of the public record. Alternative certification candidates should be evaluated using the same criteria applied to other beginning teachers.

Program evaluations should examine the effectiveness of the training and the mentoring and include financial documentation of the costs of preparing and employing alternative certification candidates. Follow-up on candidates should be done to assess their impact on school and college programs and to discover the length of their stay in teaching. Where possible, the learning of students in classes taught by interns should be compared with the learning of students in classes taught by beginning teachers prepared in regular teacher education programs.

School districts using alternative certification programs should have an advisory or policy board to oversee the program. Membership should include teachers, teacher educators, administrators, school board members, and alternative certification candidates.

Staff and resources to support such policy boards should be provided by the school district and the state department of education.

The number of alternative certification interns employed by a public school district and the subjects and the grades that they teach should be part of the public record.

This is an extension of recommendation *19*. It is important that parents and the public, as well as all other interested constituencies, be aware of the nature and the extent of alternative certification programs being offered in their school districts.

States should issue a temporary Alternative Certificate to individuals participating in these programs.

There needs to be official recognition of the status of alternative certification candidates and the fact that they are working toward full licensure. Before achieving regular certification, teachers with alternative certification should be required to pass all state-mandated tests related to professional content and pedagogy required of individuals completing teacher education programs in universities.

Recommendations for regular certification should be made by a panel of master teachers on openly stated criteria.

For the profession to police itself and protect the public, it is important that such recommendations not be vested entirely with school administrators. Panels that might include some administrators and college faculty, but are primarily composed of master teachers, should make these recommendations. Teacher members of a panel should be from faculties other than the one to which the intern teacher is assigned.

Final judgment for licensure should in no way be confused with the helping role of mentor teachers.

The certification process will require additional funds from the state and/or the district.

Reference

Huling-Austin, L., Odell, S. J., Ishler, P., Kay, R. S., & Edelfelt, R. A. (1989). *Assisting the beginning teacher.* Reston, VA: Association of Teacher Educators.